

# New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

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*Chair: Peter Burling*  
*Vice Chair: Katherine Hersh*

## **Minutes** **January 22, 10:00 am** **LOB 201**

Present: Peter Burling, Katherine Hersh, Kerrie Diers, David Preece, Representative Mary Allen, Representative Candace Bouchard, Mark Brewer, Chris Clement, Senator Martha Fuller-Clark, Mike Izbicki, Representative Sandra Keans, Nancy Larson, Tom Mahon, Chris Wellington (for Jay Minkarah), Tim Moore, Kit Morgan, Steve Pesci, Ted Starkweather, Mike Tardiff, Malcolm Taylor, Representative Robert Williams

### **I. Call to Order**

Chair Burling called meeting to order – 10:00am.

### **II. Guest – Patricia Quinn, Executive Director, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority**

Patricia Quinn discussed how NEPRA restored passenger rail service to Maine on the Downeaster. NEPRA has been coordinating service since 2002. The Portland – Boston run time is 2:25, and there are now 5 round trips per day. They would like to expand service to Brunswick, ME . This would be 30 miles of “missing link” through Freeport, which is the #1 tourist destination in ME. Having a tourism connection is important for service, and having connectivity is crucial. This 30 miles connects to another branch that gains 88 miles of total track. It also connects to Auburn, ME, which is the second most populated area in the state. The application has the support of Governor Baldachi to get it done. This is not a nimble business and not inexpensive. NEPRA came up with a work plan to rehabilitate track to Brunswick and filed a RIFF loan application through FRA in May 2008. They have not received an answer on the loan. However, they used work done for loan application and applied for a grant instead. They completed the reports on the economic benefit to state, operational benefit for Downeaster and environmental analysis. NEPRA Submitted a Track 1 application, have an operating agreement and also submitted Track 2 application to cover bases. PRIA funding for intercity passenger rail also looked at to fill gaps in schedule and improvements to trunk line. In MA the capacity and timing is tight. They would like to increase to 7 trips per day. Plaistow to Portland capacity is the piece that would be part of this application. They have a project management team on board and are ready to go once they receive approval and anticipate having this completed in 2 years.

Chair Burling asked how we can help support process. Patricia Quinn stated that support from NH would be helpful specifically a letter of support to Secretary of Transportation would be greatly appreciated. Working cooperatively will be key in moving forward.

Patricia Quinn asked about the status of the NH State rail plan. Kit Morgan stated we are going out to bid soon. The Maine plan is not complete yet, however, it is important that we tie this together in the state rail plans. Chris Clement stated we've been working internally to put out a bid to update our 2001 rail plan.

Malcolm Taylor asked about a subsidy for operations. 80% of gap has come from CMAQ funds and 20% state funds. The Downeaster receives \$5.5 mil in CMAQ and \$1.2 in state funds. ME received a waiver to use CMAQ funds. The short term plan is to continue to use CMAQ funds. The Governor supported a 50% sales tax on car rentals which goes into STARR account in ME DOT to fund non-highway projects. This generates \$3 mil per year, which is more than enough to pay the state's portion of the match.

This sustainable funding source to pay for passenger rail is unique to ME. FY09 total revenue (fairbox, café sales) was \$7.9 mil, and expenses were \$13.5 mil. The gap was \$6.1 mil and the ticket of \$15.80 per passenger, had a cost recovery of 55%. There were 471,000 passengers – 1300 people /day; 37 million passenger miles. Ms. Quinn had copies of quarterly reports. They anticipate meeting budget for this FY due to solid performance.

Sen. Fuller Clark asked how much car rental tax is in ME ? It is 6%.

Mike Izbicki asked if adding additional trains create a capacity issue at North Station?

Kit Morgan – asked if NH stops would be eliminated/reduced? Ms. Quinn stated that the average passenger travels 88 miles on weekend and 77 on weekdays. Travel time to Boston from Portland is important, but is not as much of an issue for NH travel times. They are looking at running the 5:00 pm as an express with 1 stop in NH, but NO decisions have been made. It just appears that there is a possibility of 2 peak departures and looking at not having the same stops.

Chair Burling offered the assistance of NHRTA. Kit Morgan will be monitoring the situation.

Tim Moore asked about Haverhill lines – Amtrak handles those discussions.

Steve Pesci thanked Ms. Quinn for attending today. He is pleased with Downeaster, appreciates the great cooperation, and UNH sees this as an important asset. He is strongly in favor of NHRTA writing a letter to FRA and Secretary of Transportation to support the service.

Ms. Quinn stated that the economic impact is far greater than the numbers here show. There is a lot of investment occurring. Property values around stations have increased at a faster rate than anticipated. This is our knowledge corridor – connection to universities and colleges is important.

The Downeaster applications include Track 1 and 2 for Portland North project and Track 2 for the Pan Am line corridor.

Woody Blunt stated that he is present to show that Patricia and I are in the same room together. We have a great working relationship.

Ms. Quinn stated that we do different things. There are different ways to move people around the corridor and we look at things as a system.

Mark Brewer – Asked about competition with bus. Are the fares comparable? It depends. We provide specials and discounts where we need to. It's hard to compare because it's a different product.

NH is more for commuter oriented. Full fare is \$24 each way from Portland, but there are discounts for seniors, and discounts for low travel times as well as other incentives. Not many people take advantage of them.

Chair Burling thanked Patricia Quinn for attending. We need to coordinate more meetings and more frequently.

### III. Public Input –

Tom Irwin, Conservation Law Foundation. Is glad to hear that the RFP will be going out for the State rail plan. He suggested that the NHRTA have this as a standing agenda item to get regular updates on this.

### IV. Minutes of December 18, 2009

David Preece moved to approve, Ted Starkweather seconded. Motion was approved unanimously

### V. NH Cap Corridor updates

#### A. Status of Grant Application

Chris Clement discussed the Track 3 planning grant application of \$2.8 mil. We need to identify \$1.4 mil match.

We should hear about the grant in February or early March. Where are we going to get the match? \$1 mil has been set aside for property: \$500,000 each in Manchester and Nashua. Both Mayors support using this for match. Will need to go through process to see if we can change the appropriation.

There was an additional \$30,000 identified as match, which is still a long way off from where we need to be. There is a \$350,000 gap to fill. We need to look at creative ways to do that – need to go through process to make sure all is in order.

#### B – Economic Impact Study

Mike Izbicki discussed the preliminary report. It takes a 30,000 foot overview of the area from Nashua to Concord.

The process is that we will distribute draft report to the Board and the Board will need to vote to accept it. Chair Burling asked Steve Pesci if there is someone at UNH who could validate the numbers. Steve Pesci agreed to see if the Dean of Whittemore School or another professor can review the study.

Preliminary Findings are based on 5 round trips/day, and construction generating \$260 mil in wages. These are conservative numbers. The 19,000 jobs/year expected are over a 20 year period. There is a 1.28 benefit cost ratio.

Chair Burling stated that Mike Izbicki has been clocking incredible amount of work on this. Mike has been working hard to make this happen.

c. Other –

Chair Burling testified on 2 bills: HB 1521 and HB1480. HB 1521 requires certification of no general funds for 10 years, and HB1480 takes away our power to issue bonds. We don't expect to issue bonds, but if we do it will need to go through the NH DOT process it uses.

Chair Burling, David Preece, and Tim Moore testified in opposition to the bills. Chris Clement was there to support the testimony.

Our efforts over the past 2 years have shown that NH can be a player in the game. People are paying attention to what we are doing. Passing this would be sending the wrong message.

## VI. COMMITTEE UPDATES

a. Logo Committee

David Hilts is not present today. We are still waiting to hear on copyright issues. Nancy Larson stated that they have drafted a few letters to notify winning contestant's logo, which she will distribute by email.

Chair Burling asked if we can just proceed? What should we do? Tim Moore stated we should check in with David to see how close we are on this and if he's far off from an answer, then we should just proceed.

**Representative Mary Allen – Made a motion to go ahead and use the logo and asked if anyone is strongly opposed to going forward? Chair Burling seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.**

Chair Burling will sign letter from the committee. Mike Izbicki has asked to speak at 2 conferences and would like to have cards for that. We have the design electronically and will distribute to the Board.

b. Funding Committee -

Plaistow Update – Tim Moore stated that MBTA interested in the layover facility 400 yards from proposed station and has the funding to move forward. They submitted CMAQ application to deal with operating subsidy.

Mike Izbicki noted that the reconstruction of the Merrimack Bridge is key to that project. It is a 2-3 year project and new layover facilities will reduce crossings.

Chair Burling asked if there is role for NHRTA or DOT – we'll need to know in advance what our role might be. We will need to identify who will own and operate the service in NH and how will it impact the Downaaster?

Chair Burling offered NHRTA to serve as a mediator or moderator on that discussion.

**Representative Mary Allen moved to send a letter to support track 1 and 2 applications and track 2 for Pan Am, Seconded by Senator Fuller-Clark. Approved.**

Write to Sec of Transportation and cc Pat Quinn, Joe Zabo, Governors, Both Congressional delegations.

Kerrie Diers will draft the letter, with Kathy Hersh to assist.

Senator Fuller-Clark asked if we should write a letter to support the testimony that was delivered last week? Consensus was to have it in writing signed by NHRTA. (Chair Burling left the meeting to draft the letter which was signed by some members of the NHRTA)

#### VII. OTHER DISCUSSION:

Mark Brewer – Where do we stand with renaming the Authority to Rail and Transit authority for us to be able to look at freight? Tim Moore said that this was referred to David Hilts. This will need to follow up with him on that.

Tim Moore confirmed that the meeting in Feb is the 3<sup>rd</sup> week instead of the 4<sup>th</sup> due to February vacation week.

Kathy Hersh asked about the State Rail Plan. This will be a recurring agenda item from now on, so it would be helpful to know what the schedule is for that, and is curious about the funding source. Chris Clement stated that they are a few weeks away from putting out the RFP.

Kit Morgan stated that this is a normal NH DOT consultant selection procedure. The RFP will post to website, consultants will be invited to submit letters of interest, consultant selection committee will meet and short list the consultants to submit RFPs. It is a 6 month process to select consultation. Scope has not been written yet.

Kathy Hersh asked if this will impact our application for August? Yes – we need to have a rail plan in place to submit the application. The Federal Law was changed to revamp what is supposed to be included in the rail plan. Chris Clement asked Bill Watson to put a placeholder in for using SPR funding \$200,000 to pay for the study.

Dan Kelly asked what else do we need to do to qualify for federal funding – where are the maintenance and operations plan, etc.? Chair Burling stated that we are waiting to see what Amtrak says and our discussions with them turn out.

Dan Kelly asked where are we in meeting those requirements? Chair Burling explained that we are going to do what Amtrak asks us to do. Track 3 project will help to refine what else is needed.

Barbara Pressly asked if we could define what those are and have them on the agenda every time. Chris Clement suggested that we should take a step back to review the process so far: If we don't get Track 3 funds, we can't proceed. We are focused on getting match funds.

Kathy Hersh said that there are some things we can do concurrently, but some things we need to have decisions made before we can continue.

Chair Burling said that if we get a green light from the Feds, we need to establish an agency within DOT, and we need to have professional staff to be able to proceed. The State needs to be clear that this project is important to the state by having a paid staff to deal with this.

Senator Fuller Clark reminded the Board that the Governor did include his endorsement of this project in his State of the State address yesterday. The crowd present enthusiastically supported his endorsement.

Chair Burling agreed stating that we have gotten far on determination – we don't know what will be coming but we're taking the steps we need to.

Mary Allen – motion to adjourn, seconded by Tom Mahon.

Respectfully Submitted-

Kerrie Diers, Secretary NHRTA